

## Freud and the remembered past

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Consider the following statements: first, a “psychological theory deserving any consideration must furnish an explanation of ‘memory’” (Freud, 1895, p. 299); and second, “Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences” (Breuer and Freud, 1893-95, p. 7). Taken from among Freud’s earliest works, these statements point to a new and different experience of time based on the temporalisation of the unconscious. Freud outlined the latter, initially, in the *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, relying on the model of hysteria to articulate the theory of repressed memories: “We invariably find that a memory is repressed which has only become a trauma by deferred action [*nur nachträglich*]” (1895, p. 356). We are, in many respects, still taking the measure of these inaugural statements, estimating the scope of Freud’s contribution in the wider context of what we know about human memory. My paper is a contribution to this ongoing work of critical inquiry. It comprises a close reading of some of Freud’s key texts on the theory of memory, as well as a consideration of contemporary contributions to the following themes: (a) the concept of “mnemic-trace” (*Erinnerungsrest*); (b) the relationship between memory and the uncanny; and (c) the role of conviction in our sense of the past.

### 1

What is one doing when one remembers? The criterion of action proves decisive in approaching the problem of memory. I argue in this paper that memory is *the doing of a certain kind of action*. Freud conceptualised the distinction between “memory” and “action,” most notably, in his paper “Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through” (1914). In response to repetitive enactment, understood as a disavowal of past experience, Freud (1914, p. 148) assigned analysis the task of filling in “gaps in memory” and, thereby, overcoming “resistances due to repression.” The paper demarcates the descriptive and the dynamic aspects of the analytic task, respectively. Looked at from the point of view of action, the model appears to be one-sided. The analyst’s capacity to “uncover” the resistances which are unknown to the patient defines the work of therapeutic action. According to Freud (1914, p. 147), “when [the resistances] have been got the better of, the patient often relates the forgotten situations and connections without any difficulty.” The active part of the analytic encounter is confined to the interpretative efforts of the analyst, while the patient seemingly recalls the hitherto repressed memories in an essentially passive mode.

I think the idea of a passive relation to the remembered past is incorrect. I propose an alternative conception of memory based on “imaginative elaboration” (Winnicott, 1988, p. 19 *et passim*). In order to differentiate active and passive types of memory, I shall call them re-descriptive memory and recollective memory, respectively. Neisser (1967) identified a type of recollective memory in which accurate copies of lived experience are retained (recorded) in the mind, only to “reappear,” more or less intact, at some later date. The “reappearance hypothesis” thus accounts for recollective memory. Neisser differentiated this view from what we might call the “reconstructive” hypothesis, which allows that one’s sense of the past is actively reconstructed “out of” the limited remnants of mnemic-experience: “Out of a few stored bone chips, we remember a dinosaur” (Neisser, 1967, p. 285). Neisser’s point is well

taken: our memories may be reconstructed “out of” rather scant, fragmentary sensible impressions. In any case, the idea that memory involves a type of imaginative work draws attention to the use that one makes of the past. It emphasises what one does in the act of remembering. Re-descriptive memory thus presupposes an active, imaginative reclamation of past experience, a mnemonic act as distinct from mere recollection.

The scope of re-descriptive memory may be taken up in various ways. In the neurobiology of memory, for example, there is a longstanding debate about the match between systems of encoding and retrieval as a condition of the remembered past.<sup>1</sup> Suffice it here to note the following points in light of this debate. Firstly, Daniel Schacter (1996, p. 56) advances the principle claim that long-term personal (autobiographical) memories are “built on our elaborations,” that the formation of memory depends, largely, on the process of retrieval. Secondly, the contemporary view in neuroscience amounts to a “mixed model” of recollection *and* reconstruction. The model comprises a previously encoded network of neural activity on the one hand and, on the other, a distinct pattern of neural connections (“another pattern of activity”) activated or aroused by contemporary stimuli. Thirdly, assuming there is no such thing as an “uncontaminated record” of the past; that memories are not “accurately retrievable” (Sprengnether, 2018, p. 155) from our early childhood – it would be misleading, therefore, to think of our imaginative sense of the past as somehow “flawed” or subject to “error.” To speak of the “inaccuracies” or “imperfections” of memory presupposes that “there could be a more accurate, veridical version of the past if only we were able to reach it... But the personal history that our memory constructs is not an approximation to some real truth that regrettably eludes us. It is all we have and all we can ever have. Its indeterminate quality is, in fact, the very thing that enables our psychic growth” (Parsons, 2014, p. 45). I shall come back to the idea of “incompletion” as a structural determinate of psychological development. Meanwhile, there are two options available to us: a soft version of the encoding/retrieval debate in neurobiology posits a mixed model of “recollective” and “productive” memory (to borrow the Kantian terms); a hard version, posits the metaphorical or fictive nature of autobiographical memory. I intend to defend a hard version of the constructive hypothesis on psychoanalytical grounds.

Neuroscientific research presents a challenge to Freud’s archaeological analogy. Freud (1899, p. 303) maintained that while the earliest years of childhood are subject to a type of forgetting (“amnesia”), nonetheless, “fragmentary recollections” of those early years remain intact as “memory-traces.” This assumption is called into question by the disconcerting finding that our self-narratives are not based on the simple “reappearance” of sensible impressions. Freud’s view of memory, however, is far more complicated than I am making it sound. Essentially, Freud advanced two accounts of the remembered past, one based on repressed but retrievable memories, the other on a constructive-reconstructive horizon of intelligibility. The archaeological metaphor admits two contrasting images of the past, one based on the indestructibility of historical life, the other on the imaginative elaboration of time past. And as I intend to demonstrate, reconstructive memory yields a sense of conviction; remembering is a way of making the past believable.

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<sup>1</sup> See Semon (1923) for the differentiated stages of recollective experience – including, encoding (“engraphy”), the mnemonic-trace (“engram”), and retrieval or the mnemonic-act (“ecphory”); and Lashley’s (1950) classic paper for an elaboration on the representation of a memory in the brain. More recently, Tulving (1983) and Tulving and Thomson (1973) have advanced two important views, first, that encoding is the major determinant of the trace or trait, and second, that recollection depends to a large extent on the match between the original encoding and the retrieval cues or hints. For a more general overview of the neuroscientific literature, see Holland and Kensinger (2010); see Sprengnether (2018) on the significance of the neural basis of memory systems for post-Freudian theories of memory.

We can retrace the conceptual trajectory of Freud's contrasting theses on memory from the neurological metaphor in the 1895 *Project* through the re-descriptive nature of memory in "Screen Memories" (1899) to the scriptural metaphor, the analogy of psyche and apparatus, employed in "A Note upon the 'Mystic Writing-Pad'" (1925). Freud first defined what he saw as the fundamental problem of memory in the 1895 *Project* – namely, how to represent memory in terms of the psychical mechanisms of receptivity and retention. How does the mind store memories while, at the same time, making fresh additions possible? This problem persists throughout Freud's work from beginning to end. The *Project* is a dense and difficult text. Essentially, however, the initial solution that Freud came up with in the *Project* rests on the  $Q\eta$  theory, the hypothesis of contact-barriers, and two kinds of neurones. Together, these foundational conceptual hypotheses describe the breaking open of a "path" (*Bahn*) and the possible accumulation of  $Q\eta$ . The latter, Freud (1895, p. 298) argues, "is made possible by the assumption of resistances which oppose discharge; and the structure of neurones makes it probable that the resistances are all to be located in the *contacts* [between one neurone and another], which in this way assume the value of *barriers*."

Freud (1895, p. 300) expands on the basic distinction, with regards to "*permeable* neurones (offering no resistance and retaining nothing), which serve for perception [without memory], and *impermeable* ones (loaded with resistance, and holding back  $Q\eta$ ), which are the vehicles of memory." In the case of the former,  $Q\eta$  passes through a neurone or from one neurone to another (" $Q$  flow"), with the result that "the passage of excitation" leaves no trace or impression. The "current" passes through as though the neurones possess no contact-barriers; they appear to offer no resistance of any kind to  $Q$  flow. By contrast, where contact-barriers oppose the quantity of excitation, or where they make themselves felt,  $Q\eta$  therefore passes only "with difficulty or partially"; hence "a cathected neurone filled with a certain  $Q\eta$ " (1895, p. 298). In this case, neurones may, "after each excitation, be in a different state from before and they thus afford a *possibility of representing memory*" (1895, p. 299).

It is the difference between breaches that accounts for the origin of human memory in the  $Q\eta$  theory: "in relation to the passage of an excitation, memory is evidently one of the powers which determine and direct its pathway, and, if facilitation were everywhere equal, it would not be possible to see why one pathway should be preferred [*Wegbevorzugung*]...*memory is represented by the differences in the facilitation between the  $\psi$  neurones*" (1895, p. 300). Breaching (*Bahung*) operates as the pivotal concept here. The problem of memory, as Freud defines it, reveals the extent to which psyche may be seen as a relationship of forces manifest as the difference between breaches.

I shall come back in a moment to Freud's revision of the  $Q\eta$  theory. But first I want to draw attention to another key concept in Freud's analysis of memory – namely, "screen memories." Freud first introduced this concept in a paper written in 1899; having embarked on his self-analysis in the summer of 1897, he was engaged in a series of problems concerning the nature of memory *per se*, as well as normal and pathological types of amnesia, and, in particular, the relationship between the amnesia covering the early years of childhood and infantile sexuality. The paper itself is based on a "recollection" that Freud attributes to one of his patients; in fact, it is a thinly disguised autobiographical memory.

The paper is effectively presented in two parts. Starting with a general theoretical overview, Freud rehearses the repression-recollection model of memory. This is followed by a detailed analysis of an autobiographical screen memory, which, it seems to me, takes things in the alternative direction of a construction-conviction model of memory. The role of repression in the formation of memories is summarily set out, with respect to the "remarkable

choice” that memory makes among the elements of early childhood experience. The “choice” consists in the retention of seemingly “trivial” or “indifferent” elements and the repression of what is most significant or “noteworthy.” The summary account proceeds with the idea that the repressed aspects of the event are “*omitted* rather than forgotten.” Based on this view, Freud (1899, p. 306) proffers analytic treatment as a means of “uncovering the missing portions” of childhood memories. This is seen as proof of the fact that, when the seemingly indifferent “impression” is “restored to completeness,” it thereby reveals the significance of our recollections. Freud completes the summary by furnishing the clinical description with a theoretical explanation based on the notion of unconscious conflict.

A screen memory, therefore, is seen as the result of a “compromise” between “two psychical forces,” one of which retains the “indifferent” event in memory while the other resists what is unacceptable or “objectionable” to consciousness: “These two opposing forces do not cancel each other out, nor does one of them...overpower the other. Instead, a compromise is brought about...What is recorded as a mnemonic image is not the relevant experience itself – in this respect the resistance gets its way; what is recorded is another psychical element closely associated with the objectionable one – and in this respect the *first* principle shows its strength, the principle which endeavours to fix important impressions by establishing reproducible mnemonic images” (1899, p. 307). The explanation rests on the idea of “substitution involving a compromise,” whereby the unacceptable is “displaced” (transferred, transported) onto the retrievable. Through the psychical mechanism of “condensation” the retentive work of the mnemonic image holds the psychic tension between the memorable and the unacceptable, between its own innocuous content and a repressed sexual content.

We are familiar with this account of sexual repression and neurotic conflict, an account, that is, in which the defence is set against the internal processes of drives, affects, and representations. There is, however, more to the paper on “screen memories” than an articulation of the repression-recollection model. Most notably, it shows that from as early as 1899, Freud had already laid the conceptual ground for a “constructivist” theory of memory. This is evident in the second half of the paper, where Freud’s presents an autobiographical memory. The memory dates from Freud’s early childhood, before the age of three and a half years, and includes a bucolic scene in which he recalls playing in a meadow with his nephew and niece, John and Pauline, before the family moved from Freiberg to Manchester, and before Freud’s own family relocated from Freiberg to Leopoldstadt. We are offered something of a fairy-tale, “an uncontaminated state of pristine nature prior to the Fall” (Whitebook, 2017, p. 79).

The details of the memory need not concern us here. Rather, I want to draw attention to what Freud has to say here about the *formation* of memory. The scene seems not to have recurred in Freud’s memory periodically since his childhood. The “recollection” is stirred up, initially, when at the age of sixteen (a year younger than reported in the paper), Freud returned to Freiberg for the first time to spend his summer holidays with the Fluss family. One of the daughters of this family, Gisela, who was three years younger than Freud, came to his attention: “I fell immediately in love...I kept it completely secret. After a few days the girl went off to her school...and it was this separation after such a short acquaintance that brought my longings to a really high pitch. I passed many hours in solitary walks through the lovely woods that I had found once more and spent my time building castles in the air. These, strangely enough, were not concerned with the future but sought to improve the past” (1899, p. 313). His fantasies and longings encapsulate the retrospective-prospective movement of psychic time, in which the un-lived life (“to improve the past”) comes to the fore as a fictional construct of autobiographical memory. It is the fictional narrative, the creative imperative to relive the past in accordance with a primordial sense of hopefulness, that renders the

“recollection” meaningful as a memory. Jones (1954, p. 28) provides the requisite oedipal interpretation: “The love episode with [Gisela], and the unconscious erotic phantasy that accompanied it, must have re-animated the infantile rape phantasy [defloration] concerning Pauline (and, doubtless, ultimately his mother also).”

The “recollection” has yet to emerge as a fully formed memory, however. Freud thus recounts a second occasion which shapes the “impressions” of the Alpine scene. At the age of nineteen (again, a year younger than reported in the paper) Freud visited his half-brother, Emanuel, and his family in Manchester, where, as we have seen, they had settled after leaving Freiberg. During the visit he was reacquainted with the two children who appear alongside him in the screen memory. And while on this occasion he does not fall in love (with Pauline), nonetheless, he learns that his father and his uncle “had concocted a plan by which I was to exchange the abstruse subject of my [university] studies for one of more practical value, settle down, after my studies were completed, in the place where my uncle lived, and marry my cousin’ (1899, 314). With the passage of time, the affective threads of memory and hope move closer together under the verdict of longing. Jones (1954, pp. 28-29) describes how Freud, “[w]hen faced with the difficulty of finding a livelihood in Vienna...often reflected on this second, lost opportunity of an easier life and thought that there had been much to be said for his father’s plan.”

Jones helps us to see what is going on here by referring to the *repetition* of “lost opportunity.” Our attention is thus directed to the act of temporal recovery – most notably, the act of narration – as a repeated response to primordial loss. In effect, Gisela Fluss and Freud’s niece Pauline are identified with each other in a construction that rests on the mnemic trace of an “unlived life,” rather than a sensible impression of a so-called original experience. The construction reveals the thought that had one married this or that girl, one’s life “would have become much pleasanter” (Freud, 1899, p. 317). There is more to the thought than rueful reflection, however. The “unlived life” is also an “internal image” of the archaic, preoedipal past, the reclamation of which – according to Proust’s (1972, p. 472) “vast dimension which I had not known myself to possess” – provides our memories with increasing depth and meaning. The novel (pre-eminently in Proust) exemplifies the transformative act of memory, and I suspect that our subjective feelings toward the past provide the clearest overlap between psychoanalysis and literature. *À la recherche du temps perdu* redefines the experience of time. For Proust, the past figures first as irretrievable loss – “It is a labour in vain to attempt to recapture it: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile” (1976, p. 57); and secondly, as a work of reclamation, the immoderate prolongation of “the dimension of Time,” Marcel’s “monsters” or “giants” plunged into the living past (1972, p. 474).

We can see the same model of narrative temporality, the same imaginative experience of time, at work in Freud. On the one hand, Freud’s adolescent love for Gisela reveals a longing for “primary love” (Balint, 1937). A myth of origins is thus inscribed in the screen memory: “On looking back [Freud] attributed his infatuation to Gisela’s black hair and eyes and to the deeply moved state of mind that this visit to his birthplace had induced. It was evidently not the girl’s charms themselves, since he commented on his lack of taste; he also said that he never exchanged a single word with her. So it was love of some internal image of his own plainly derived from far deeper sources but associated with his early home” (Jones, 1954, p. 36 n 3). On the other hand, the childhood memory is constructed by an imaginative projection of two longed-for fantasies of marriage and prosperity – i.e., “deflowering a girl” and “material comfort” (Freud, 1899, p. 318) – on to one another. Crucially, Freud (1899, p. 315) himself hints at the imaginative nature of his memory: “people often construct such things unconsciously – almost like works of fiction.”

Is the qualification of memory's fictional nature warranted? It would appear that Freud believed so. The authenticity of the remembered past, the early childhood scene, is maintained on the grounds that while we "select" a given memory as psychically homologous to subsequent experiences and fantasies, the memories themselves are nonetheless perfectly genuine. They are conceived as memories of a past reality. Freud (1899, p. 316) duly arrives at his definition of a "screen memory" – a "recollection whose value lies in the fact that it represents in the memory impressions and thoughts of a later date whose content is connected with its own by symbolic or similar links." Transforming itself into childhood memories, fantasy thereby extends the reach for meaning to unconscious thoughts; in particular, it disguises the explicit sexual element ("gross sexual aggression") by means of more acceptable content. Freud believed that it is possible for repressed fantasies to "slip away into a childhood scene" only insofar as the impressions left by the original event meet the fantasies halfway. In this respect, the mnemic trace provides a surface of emergence for the disguised fantasy, which, in turn, subjects the original scene to a degree of distortion. For Freud the subjective nature of the latter does not cast the objectivity of the scene itself into doubt.

Let us take stock of the situation regarding the vital elements of the past. Based on the notion of "screen memories," remembering may be broken down into its component parts – namely, the *mnemic trace*, the *mnemic act*, and the *mnemic image*. First, while insisting on the authenticity of the original scene, Freud (1899, p. 322) adds that "the raw material of memory-traces...remains unknown to us in its original form." The primal form of mnemic-experience is accessible only in its effects. Secondly, the transformation from primary impression (the unconscious mnemic trace) to representational image involves the doing of a certain kind of action. For Freud the mnemic act results in "falsifications of memory," largely, due to the logic of repression; but he also allows for other motives, indeed, with no greater regard for "historical accuracy." Our sense of the past depends on the imaginative elaboration of the mnemic act, which constitutes the groundwork of memory. Thirdly, the mnemic image is a repetition, but not "an exact repetition of the impression that was originally received." The mnemic image does not correspond to the actual facts of early childhood distinct from imaginative elaboration; the so-called original impression is already "worked over" by the productive imagination.

### 3

Despite his explicit claims to the contrary, I believe Freud conceptualised a past that has never been present. This is my main argument. It is incumbent on me therefore to substantiate the principal claim that the remembered past is essentially an imaginative construct. Let us pick up the threads of the *Q $\eta$*  theory. In a letter to Fliess, written three years before the publication of "Screen Memories," Freud (cited in Masson, 1985, pp. 207-208) announced a momentous shift in his thinking, a shift that redefined the act of remembering not only as a structure of delay (*Nachträglichkeit*) but also as a type of "writing." The letter effectively cleared the ground for a reformulation of the entire system of the *Project*. In particular, it announced the prospect of a "new psychology" – including, a theory of perception and (at least) three modes of registration. Recourse to the vocabulary of "registration" (*Niederschrift*), "transcription" (*Umschrift*), and "sign" (*Zeichen*) placed the psychoanalytical theory of memory on a new footing. It also redefined the parameters for the experience of time.

This brings us to another key text. Further to the theoretical advance achieved in the 1895 *Project*, Freud sought to consolidate the metaphor of "writing," and the concomitant

analogy of “psyche” and “apparatus,” in his paper “A Note upon the ‘Mystic Writing-Pad’” (1925). Its brevity notwithstanding, the paper is among Freud’s most important contributions to the psychoanalysis of time. The Mystic Writing-Pad (*der Wunderblock*) is a children’s toy, a writing machine, consisting of a slab of dark resin or wax with a paper edging, on top of which rests a thin transparent sheet comprising two layers, an upper layer of transparent celluloid and a lower layer of thin translucent waxed paper. While the upper sheet is fixed in place, the lower layer however can be moved. It requires two hands to operate the device, which consists in scratching or scoring the surface layer of celluloid with a stylus, writing without ink, and thus pressing the lower surface of the waxed paper onto the wax slab. This produces legible marks (“dark writing”) on the otherwise smooth whitish-grey sheet of celluloid. In order to “destroy” what has been rendered visible, to make the legible illegible, one need only lift the double covering-sheet from the wax slab; the impressions now disappear and, indeed, do not re-appear when the two surfaces come together once more.

Freud (1925, p. 230), however, was intrigued by a further aspect of the device – namely, while the surface of the Mystic Pad may be clear, “it is easy to discover that the permanent trace of what was written is retained upon the wax slab itself and is legible in suitable lights.” We can now see how the Mystic Pad models the basic problem of memory. The mechanical device affords Freud (1925, p. 230) a perfect analogy of “two separate but interrelated component parts or systems” – that is, a “receptive surface” together with a “protective shield” (the layer of celluloid) and “permanent traces” comprising legible meanings. The analogy allows Freud to posit a radically new theory of memory. In particular, further to the intentional horizon of reference, treated by Husserl (1966) as a pattern of recollections and expectations (“retention” and “protentions”), Freud conceived the problem of memory increasingly in scriptural terms. In effect, the 1925 paper carried Freud beyond the phenomenological notion of horizon, including, the past-oriented and future-oriented parts of the horizon pertaining to the act of perception.

Freud (1925, p. 228) continued to remodel what he saw as the essential problem of memory – how to account for an “unlimited receptive capacity for new perceptions” and, at the same time, for the retention of “permeant memory-traces” of those perceptions. And he now explicitly ruled out forms of supplementary memory, or substitutes for memory (paper, slate), where one or other of the basic criteria (receptivity and retention) is not met. Further to which he presented the Mystic Pad as analogous to his conception of the perceptual apparatus (the system *Pcpt.-Cs.*). The model allows for the idea that perceptions are received but not retained. At the same time, Freud (1925, p. 228) notes that “the permanent traces of the excitations which have been received are preserved in ‘mnemic systems’ [the *Ucs.*] lying behind the perceptual system.” The work of memory takes place in “adjoining systems” alongside the receptive surface; most importantly, the impressions left in the mnemic systems are not susceptible to erasure. The Pad thus offers an image of indestructibility pertaining below the surface play of appearance and disappearance – operating, that is, at a deeper level than “the flickering-up [*Aufleuchten*] and passing-away [*Vergehen*] of consciousness in the process of perception” (1925, p. 231).

What does this mean for our understanding of time and memory? The radical implications of the scriptural analogy are the topic of Derrida’s celebrated commentary on Freud’s paper. Derrida (1966, p. 221) shows how Freud approached the problem of memory in three progressive stages, with increasing “rigour, inwardness, and differentiation.” I have noted these stages summarily in my initial description of the Mystic Pad, starting with the consideration of writing as “a technique subservient to memory, an external, auxiliary technique of psychical memory which is not memory itself” (Derrida, 1966, p. 221). Freud does not necessarily explore the implications of the “exteriority” of memory. Nevertheless, the initial reference to auxiliary apparatuses (*Hilfsapparate*) raises the question of artificial or

prosthetic memory, and as such recalls the distinction between *hypomnēsis* and *mnēmē* in the *Phaedrus*. Plato's attack is levelled not at memory *per se* so much as "the substitution of the mnemonic device for live memory," the substitution of "the passive, mechanical 'by-heart' for the active reanimation of knowledge, for its reproduction in the present" (Derrida, 1968b, p. 108). Writing enters the fray at this point: "The space of writing, space *as* writing, is opened up in the violent movement of this surrogation, in the difference between the *mnēmē* and *hypomnēsis*. The outside is already *within* the work of memory. The evil slips in within the relation of memory to itself, in the general organisation of the mnesic activity" (1968b, p. 109). In a classical play of purity and danger, the metaphysical endorsement of "living memory" casts the whole idea of metaphorical memory under the heading of defilement: "Memory is...contaminated by its first substitution: *hypomnēsis*. But what Plato *dreams* of is a memory with no sign. That is, with no supplement. A *mnēmē* with no *hypomnēsis*, no *pharmakon*" (1968b, p. 109). The Romantic longings of modernity, not least of all, in certain versions of psychoanalysis, retain the evaluative fact of "spontaneity" as a given.

In the first place, however, it is simply "a question of considering the conditions which customary writing surfaces impose on the operation of mnemonic supplementation" (Derrida, 1966, pp. 222). In this respect, the model does not address the essential problem of memory that carries over from the *Project*: weighing the different properties of a sheet of paper and a slate, Freud (1925, pp. 227-228) concludes that "an unlimited receptive capacity and a retention of permanent traces seem to be mutually exclusive properties in the apparatus which we use for our memory: either the receptive surface must be renewed or the note must be destroyed." The critical evaluation of "customary writing surfaces" reveals the extent to which "Freud, like Plato...continues to oppose hypomnemonic writing and writing *en tei psychei*, itself woven of traces, empirical memories of a present truth outside of time" (Derrida, 1966, p. 227). The Freudian interpretation remains limited by the opposition of "interiority" and "exteriority"; hence the "Platonic" closure of Freudianism. Nevertheless, the second analogy goes further than a mere acknowledgment of an *aide-mémoire*: "If we lift the entire covering-sheet...off the wax slab, the writing vanishes and...does not re-appear again. The surface of the Mystic Pad is clear of writing and once more capable of receiving impressions. But it is easy to discover that the permanent trace of what was written is retained upon the wax slab itself and is legible in suitable lights" (Freud, 1925, p. 230). The contradictory criteria dating from the *Project*, namely, "a receptive surface that can be used over and over again" (like a slate) and the retention or "permanent traces of what has been written" (like a sheet of paper), are met by a double system. The Mystic Pad thus "solves the problem of combining two functions *by dividing them between two separate but interrelated component parts or systems*" (1925, p. 230; emphasis in the original). Despite the persistent underlying opposition between psychical and metaphorical memory, the whole of psyche (not just the perceptual layer) can be modelled according to the second analogy.

The scriptural model comprises a third and final analogy, which is not only the most far-reaching aspect of Freud's theory of memory, but also a defining example of his metaphorical thinking in general. As I mentioned in my initial summary, Freud (1925, pp. 230-231) compares "the celluloid and waxed paper cover with the system *Pcpt.Cs.* and its protective shield, the wax slab with the unconscious behind them." Furthermore, Freud (1925, p. 231) goes on to admit the *temporality* of the wax slab, "the appearance and disappearance of the writing," which he compares to "the flickering-up [*Aufleuchten*] and passing-away [*Vergehen*] of consciousness in the process of perception." The alternating of the visible and invisible – i.e., the legible and illegible determinations of meaning – admits the phenomenon of active, psychic time in conjunction with "the multiplicity of sensitive layers."



It remains for us to explore the possibilities that Freud brought into view by means of the scriptural analogy, or the resemblance of artificial memory to human memory. In fact, Freud (1925, p. 231) himself pressed the analogy yet further: “On the Mystic Pad the writing vanishes every time the close contact is broken between the paper which receives the stimulus and the wax slab which preserves the impression. This agrees with a notion which I have long had about the method by which the perceptual apparatus of our mind functions, but which I have hitherto kept to myself.” The concept of time is predicated on periodic erasure, the idea that consciousness fades each time the cathexis is withdrawn and the contact is broken. The basic intuition of “discontinuity” extends from the 1895 *Project* and Freud’s letters to Flies through *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) to the paper under consideration. There are any number of ways to reconstruct this line of thinking. I shall limit myself, here, to three propositions on memory.

First, the opposition of psyche and apparatus is not sustainable on empirical grounds. Freud (1925, p. 230) simultaneously announced and resisted this possibility, relying on the full support and authority of tradition for his resistance: “There must come a point at which the analogy between an auxiliary apparatus [*Hilfsapparate*] of this kind [the Mystic Pad] and the organ which is its prototype will cease to apply. It is true, too, that once the writing has been erased, the Mystic Pad cannot ‘reproduce’ it from within; it would be a mystic pad indeed if, like our memory, it could accomplish that.” Derrida (1966, p. 227) situates the Freudian opposition of psych and apparatus, the interiority of “live memory” and “a dead complexity without depth,” in the Cartesian context of space and mechanics, but also (once again) in the tradition of Plato and the opposition of *hypomnēsis* and *mnēmē*. Moreover, he maintains that given his acknowledgement of the irreducible “unity of life and death,” Freud certainly had the conceptual wherewithal to overcome the dichotomy and, thereby, to expose so-called “empirical memories” to the rule of metaphor. Generally, the possibility of undoing its own binary oppositions is integral to the Freudian interpretation, which, in this case, means that the sense of the past cannot be exhausted by psychology alone, but has to take cognisance of the exteriority of mechanical models and archival apparatuses (metaphorical memory) as well as the “natural wax” (so to speak) of physical memory. Spontaneity is, at once, gestural *and* metaphorical.

Second, the mnemonic-trace operates through the registration of its own erasure. Freud (1925, p. 232) advanced this proposition in terms of “representation” (*die Vorstellung*): “If we imagine one hand writing upon the surface of the Mystic Writing-Pad while another periodically raises its covering-sheet from the wax slab, we shall have a concrete representation of the way in which I tried to picture the functioning of the perceptual apparatus of our mind.” The work of remembering registers that which it represses and disavows. Derrida (1966, p. 226) underlines the extent to which mnemonic-traces, “in the ‘present’ of their first impression” (the “original” impression of the senses), are determined and formed by “the double force of repetition and erasure.”

Third, metaphor constitutes a past that has never been present. In terms of the Mystic Pad, metaphor applies to “the analogy between two apparatuses” (psychical and non-psychical) and “the possibility of this representational relation.” The recourse to metaphor raises a question which, as Derrida (1966, p. 228) points out, Freud, “despite his premises, and for reasons which are no doubt essential...failed to make explicit, at the very moment when he had brought this question to the threshold of being thematic and urgent.” The question of non-psychical mnemonic iteration – the reproducibility of fragmentary impressions of the senses (sensible impression) – presents us with the most rigorous and uncompromising expression of possibility in Freud’s discourse: “Metaphor as a rhetorical or didactic device is possible here only through the solid metaphor, the ‘unnatural,’ historical production of a *supplementary* machine, *added to* the psychical organization in order to supplement its

finitude...The historico-technical production of this metaphor which survives individual (that is, generic) psychical organization, is of an entirely different order than the production of an intrapsychical metaphor...Here the question of technology...may not be derived from an assumed opposition between the psychical and the nonpsychical, life and death. Writing, here, is *technē* as the relation between life and death, between present and representation, between the two apparatuses” (1966, p. 228).

#### 4

Freud maintained that conscious recollections relating to our childhood, are in fact distortions or “screens” that conceal aspects of our experience. Far from a static reproduction of something that happened in the past, childhood memories are viewed as so many fantasy-based confabulations, the disturbing aspects of which are disguised by more acceptable wishes. Freud set the scene for this more active conception of recollective experience not only in “Screen Memoires” but also in his *agon* with “aesthetics” in “The ‘Uncanny’” (1919). Memory is played out in disturbing but vital ways in uncanny experience; before turning to the relationship between memory and the uncanny, let me retrace my steps. When Freud (1899, p. 318) tells us that “the childhood scene itself...undergoes changes” in the act of remembering, that the retrieval situation actively contributes to the meaning of time past, and that “falsifications of memory may be brought about in this way” – he is drawing attention to the fundamental paradox pertaining to autobiographical memory. The past event (in this case, the childhood scene) is not necessarily fictitious but exists in memory only by fictional means. The distinction between “screen memories” and “other memories derived from our childhood” breaks down, at this point, in dramatic terms: “It may indeed be questioned whether we have any memories at all *from* our childhood: memories *relating to* our childhood may be all that we possess’ (1899, p. 322; emphasis in the original). This strikes me as among Freud’s most radical findings.

The privileging of memories “relating to...” casts the relationship between “personal identity” and “historical life” (Schechtman, 1996) in an entirely new light. The mediation of memory and reality by fiction – the “falsification of memory” – is acknowledged as an inevitable but perturbing phenomenon of psychic life. We can summarise the disturbance on two counts. First, “screen memories” confirm the extent to which past events in general are subject to imaginative elaboration. Second, the inclusion of “the uncanny” (*das Unheimliche*) as part of the mnemonic-act increases the perturbing effect of psychic time by suspending the relation between “imagination” and “reality” – “an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced” (Freud, 1919, p. 244). Essentially, the uncanny denotes something strangely familiar that cannot be remembered. Freud (1901: 265) presented a clear formulation of the perturbation of memory, along these lines, in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, insisting that “what is looked for is never remembered.”

The connection between memory and the uncanny accounts for a disquieting sense of strangeness – including, a “feeling of derealisation” (*Entfremdungsgefühl*) – that extends from our sense of the past to our sense of self. In a late contribution to the conceptual itinerary under discussion, Freud (1936, p. 246) describes “a disturbance of memory and a falsification of the past,” once again, from his own experience. The experience itself dates from 1904: standing on the Acropolis and surveying the surrounding landscape, Freud was surprised by the thought that suddenly entered his mind: “So all this really *does* exist.” The “disturbance” demonstrates the extent to which surprise, or the “shock of thought” (Reik, 1948), plays a decisive role in the innovation of the mnemonic act. Freud (1936, pp. 246-247)

goes on to explain that he had not previously “doubted the real existence of Athens. I only doubted whether I should ever see Athens. It seemed to me beyond the realms of possibility that I should travel so far...there was something about it that was wrong, that from the earliest times had been forbidden...the essence of success was to have got further than one’s father.”

We can summarise the “disturbance of memory” on three counts. First, imagination and reality exert themselves equiprimordially in the “uncanny effect” (Freud, 1919, p. 244): the blurred or indistinct relationship between imagination and reality is less important for our subjective feelings of remembering than the codetermining function of imagination and reality. Second, as Freud’s experience on the Acropolis demonstrates, remembering our past is invariably disturbing; the act of remembering and the act of perturbing are inextricably linked in the “uncanny effect” of temporality. Third, the creative imperative of recollective experience is driven by the very perturbation of the latter; we repeatedly translate (re-describe) the *unheimlich* in and through the stories that we tell ourselves about our past. It is precisely our efforts to ward off the more disturbing feelings of derealisation that result in “false pronouncements about the past” (Freud, 1936, p. 244).

In a contemporary elaboration on this order of disturbance, Michael Parsons (2009a, pp. 8-9) links memory and the uncanny as follows: “staying open to what we find *unheimlich*, depends on our allowing the sum of past experience to infuse what is encountered in the present with unexpected, unpredictable meaning.” Parsons (2009b, p. 21) takes up and reworks the active conception of Freudian temporality on the basic assumption that the “work of remembering” invariably extends beyond recollection. In my view, Parsons and Derrida come to similar conclusions concerning the internal differentiation (“disturbance”) of the alleged spontaneity of memory. As concrete occasions for the mnemonic act, “listening” is for Parsons what “writing” is for Derrida; listening and writing alike “bear witness to the finitude of the mnemonic spontaneity” (Derrida, 1966, p. 228).

The following discussion is based on the scene of teaching (the psychoanalytic seminar) rather than the analytic encounter; the two situations are nonetheless inextricably linked. Parsons taught a seminar for a number of years at the Institute of Psychoanalysis, the training organisation of the British Psycho-Analytical Society, entitled “Listening to ourselves listening to others.” In drawing attention to listening and how to listen, Parsons tells us something fundamental about the way analysts work, while at the same time opening up a new line of inquiry in the psychoanalysis of memory. The analyst’s “evenly suspended attention” (Freud, 1923, p. 239) confirms that our hearing is “never a simple reception by the senses” (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 281). The possibility of listening presupposes an original transfer of meaning that has a direct bearing on the problem of memory. Experience is not first fixed in the memory as sensible impression, but, rather, is susceptible to the unconscious communication of original transference. The latter may be understood as a type of “reverie” (Bion, 1962) modelled on the original proximity of mother and infant. We remember *as we listen*, taking our bearings from the original relationship in which listening and being-listened-to coexist under the conditions of primary maternal attention.

Essentially, Parsons links the Freudian notion of active time (the work of remembering) to the activity of listening-as-thinking. The link, which relies on Freud’s account of the uncanny, is forged experientially through various pedagogic exercises – including, the seminar group and group leader listening to the sounds of the night. The object of the solitary night-time exercise, which recalls the primal scene with the young child listening to the nocturnal parental couple, is to notice how much more one hears at the end of the designated half-hour than at the beginning. One’s hearing is thus vivified, although the increased sense of aliveness may be disturbing. In the weekend of the night-time exercise, Parsons was visiting the village where he had grown up from the age of twelve, a place the

“deep stillness and mysterious nocturnal sounds” of which appear to evoke adolescent memories. The story is not sufficiently detailed for us to elaborate on any longing that the narrator may have had for the woods near his adolescent home. Nevertheless, there is clearly more to this scene than a recollection of bygone times spent wandering alone in the woods. Parsons does not evoke nostalgia for his younger self. Rather, “listening to listening” reveals at once “an uncanny time of night” (*intempesta nocte*) as well as a passage towards the other. It involves listening to oneself as another:

Pondering [the night-time sounds] amongst the trees, I knew all at once that I was not alone. I looked around. Nobody was there. The vivid sensation persisted, however, of another presence. Then I understood. Beside me, watching, listening, was my adolescent self. I knew, of course, that there was nobody there. I was not hallucinating. But the sense of another human presence was distinct...and we settled down – myself as I am now and myself as I was then – to savour the night together. (Parsons, 2011, p. 53)

The encounter between “two parts” of one’s life is a difficult but vital encounter in the affective configuration of psychic time. It becomes so (on this occasion, at least) only *after* the initial disturbance, after Parsons is out of the woods. In glancing back, Parsons fends off the sentimental resolution of nostalgia; he lets us see that there is something too “settled” about the relish with which the “we” directs its attention towards the object of the pedagogic exercise. The situation could all too easily be misconstrued as an encounter with one’s younger self. But for reasons that become increasingly clear, this would compromise the more radical import of the exercise. It would also reinstate a pre-Freudian notion of time. A premature settlement based on the rounded sufficiency and structural unity of self-identity, together with the adoption of a single unifying tone for past and present, would fail to register the very strangeness of the scene – indeed, the feeling of uncanniness.

Parsons tell us that driving away from the woods, he suddenly realised, with “an extraordinary sense of shock,” that he was not wearing his seat belt. What makes the thought shocking? He had no sense of having “forgotten” to put on his seat belt. He describes getting back into a car “that did not have seat belts.” This was “a deeply uncanny moment. I learnt to drive before seat belts were introduced... The ‘I’ that got into the car and drove away from the woods had not been my present-day ‘I,’ but the other one, the ‘I’ that was standing beside me in the night... The separation of past and present had collapsed, and my present-day ‘I’ suddenly found itself in a car that it did not know” (2011, p. 54). Parsons’s account of the uncanny mnemonic-trace (the “uncanny moment”) rests on a creative but jarring encounter, involving a disruptive “collision” of past and present. The disruption of uncanny experience is inimical to the synthetic function of temporal perception in the phenomenological sense. At the same time, it does not allow for a simple augmentation of identity or self-experience. As in a waking dream, the sense of the past flares up as “collision” and “shock.” It is the shock of sensibility, as well as the reactivation of cathected mnemonic traces, that determines the affective nature of the encounter.

Parsons does not come face-to-face with a mnemonic image in the sense of a revived past experience, or a reappearance of historical life. The “mapping” of past and present on to each other is, in essence, a fiction. The person standing beside him in the night is not the narrator’s younger self. This is the case in a trivial sense, that is to say, insofar as there is literally no one else there. It applies more profoundly, however, with respect to an “inner experience” (*l’expérience intérieure*) that is not assimilable to self-experience. Retrieval is overdetermined by the invention of something wholly strange; something that has come to light but should have remained hidden and secret (Freud, 1919, p. 225). Paradoxically, what

is found, and as such is experienced by ourselves, lies outside our grasp; we re-find something for the first time, something that we cannot appropriate. From the point of view of uncanny experience, the literal absence of another person, in Parsons's narrative, is relatively banal compared to the influx of new meaning and its affective reach. Freud admits as much in a letter to Martha Bernays: "I always find it uncanny when I can't understand someone in terms of myself" (1882; quoted in Jones, 1954, p. 352). Similarly, Freud (1919, p. 248 n 1) experiences feelings of uncanniness on mistaking his own reflection in a looking-glass with the face of another. Parsons attributes positive value to these mnemic disturbances. Experienced as "another human presence," the "person" is who he is, not necessarily as a hallucination or a fantasy, but rather, as an imaginative construct with its own affective resonance. The "shock" is not only primordial and animistic – a vital unsettling excitation modelled on the child's fear of the dark (Freud 1919, p. 252 n 1); but also, fictive and metaphorical. It is the narrative of emotional disturbance that inscribes the otherness of the uncanny in the very heart of experience.

What do we mean by "uncanny experience"? The state of mind, in this case, does not necessarily come under the heading of "phantasy." The experience may be described more accurately as one of "illusion." A meeting with a strangely familiar figure looms up in the story of the night, and the story, in turn, shapes the uncanny effect. The effect is manifest at various levels of articulation in language, while the initial feeling is transformed in its articulation. The memory-traces of sensory experience are invested, in retrospect, with new meaning; the act of remembering itself renders the experience-traces as meaningful phenomena; and, so long as the emphasis is on "making it appear," remembering *is* the meaning of the past. In this respect, the "unity" of the acting person is given in the act of articulation in language. Our sense of personal identity is brought about not in the intentionality of temporal awareness (the phenomenological "identity" of our past, present, and future selves), but, rather, by the accounts that we give of ourselves in time. This is evident in Freud's account of the uncanny. The structural ambivalence that Freud (1919, p. 226) describes in the opposition of *heimlich* and *unheimlich* causes the "aesthetic" to exceed its own "province." Something new comes about in the vital discordance of the uncanny moment, something which in its articulation refuses to settle matters on the grounds of self-identity and historical life.

An accurate and perfectly efficacious description of something one imagines; something that evokes a perturbing amalgam of surprise, astonishment, and dissonance – the uncanny mnemic-trace renders the past out of kilter. The discordance, however, does not in any way compromise the vital significance of the encounter. The articulation of the scene is evidently alive with a sense of the past. And yet while indubitably manifest in its effects, the remembered past is "a 'past' that has never been present" (Derrida, 1968a, p. 21). The experience is "shocking" not on account of a revival of the lived past, but, rather, insofar as *après-coup* extends from the present to the immemorial past. The (absent) seat belt is not merely a signifier of "long ago" in the literal sense of the phrase. It is also a metaphor of a past that lies beyond the reach of recollection, beyond "the becoming-past of what has been present" (Derrida, 1968a, p. 21). The metaphoric meaning of the seat belt problematises the opposition of past and present, absence and presence, the interiority and exteriority of memory. This, at least, is how I understand the disturbance of the uncanny moment: for me it represents the "semantic shock" (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 296) of metaphor in the midst of living memory. My argument is that language creates its own disturbance, even as thought contains the shock of its origins. The seat belt, as I see it, shows itself not as a referent of one's younger self but as the self-showing of "appearance's apparition and luminescence" (Henry, 1993, p. 14), the *fulgur* of meaning in narrative discourse.

How, exactly, do “collision” and “shock” disclose new meaning? One is momentarily torn away from oneself, uprooted in the face of the uncanny, and exposed to the presence of another, or to oneself as another. This raises further questions. What comes in the aftermath of the uncanny moment? How does disturbance disclose new possibilities? I contend that we make good the hints of meaning in our attempt to live with the shock of the uncanny. This applies to the night-time exercise presented by Parsons: in the seminar on listening, learning to live with the uncanny, or being-with the uncanny other, exposes the scene of teaching itself to “a time without tutelary present” (Derrida, 1994, p. xviii). The “other one” is never present as such, and yet one has an impression of something or someone, “the sense of another human presence.” The idea of “conviction” comes into play, here, as an articulation of an otherwise inaccessible primal reality. Being-with another who is never present, nor presently living, requires a sense of conviction. Freud elaborated at length, in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), on the question of “conviction” – that is, with respect to the convictions of religious believers. For the pious believer “the idea of a single god produced such an overwhelming effect on men because it is a portion of the eternal *truth* which, long concealed, came to light at last and was then bound to carry everyone along with it” (Freud, 1939, p. 129).

Conviction applies beyond the reach of evaluative facts. The “pious solution,” in other words, “contains the truth – but the *historical* truth and not the *material* truth” (1939, p. 129). For Freud, “historical truth” does not correspond to objective reality, nor is it simply a phenomenon of psychic reality; it is rather a “truth” formed out of the mnemic-traces of a past reality. Freud (1937, p. 268) construes delusions, hallucinations, and analytic constructions alike as semantic acts: “The delusions of patients appear to me to be the equivalents of the constructions which we build up in the course of an analytic treatment...Just as our construction is only effective because it recovers a fragment of lost experience, so the delusion owes its convincing power to the element of historical truth which inserts in the place of rejected reality.” The hints of meaning, Freud’s fragments of “historical truth,” are invested with ontological significance as so many convincing constructs. In a sublime balance of signification, in which living-there and being-with rest on “belief in” (Winnicott, 1963, p. 94), the child’s fear of the dark becomes a unique song for the night.

I propose that “conviction” is an integral part of the projection of new meaning; that it involves a disclosure of new possibilities in the form of “historical truth,” something that “*must* be believed” (Freud, 1939, p. 130). Belief thus presupposes disturbances of memory; one holds convictions, as distinct from consciously remembered historical facts, that have been imaginatively constructed on disturbing grounds: “It may be eerily disturbing to find oneself in the grip of a process operating outside one’s awareness, but it may also open new inward horizons” (Parsons, 2011, p. 56-57). Parsons helps us see that believability – Freud’s (1939, p. 13) “justified memory” – is not a textual effect so much as an elementary form of imaginative living. This calls for a revision of classical metapsychology. Freud (1919, pp. 247-252) maintained a categorical distinction not only between the “admissible” and “inadmissible” uncanny but also between feelings of uncanniness in everyday life and in literature. By contrast, Parsons (2011, p. 49) credits the value of the uncanny as a general phenomenon: “It is not in the end possible to divide, as Freud wished to, the uncanny as an aesthetic attribute of a work of art from the uncanny as a subjective experience in real life.” The uncanny is seen as a vital aspect of everyday life, which involves simultaneously keeping “oneself open to what is *unheimlich*” and moving “up and down the developmental pathways of one’s life” (2009a, p. 15). Again, this represents a subtle but radical amendment of Freud’s (1919, pp. 240-241) account of the animistic nature of uncanny experience. Parsons (2011, p.

57) comments, pointedly, that even “supposing, with Freud, that uncanny experiences stem from a return to earlier ways of being, this need not be a withdrawal from reality, but may serve a purpose similar to the child’s apparent regression.”

Parsons credits the necessity of illusion in the English tradition of Winnicott, Rycroft, and Milner. At the same time, he draws on the work of César and Sára Botella, which brings us back to the “structural incompleteness” of psychism. The dialogue here between English and French psychoanalysis allows us to link the truth-effect of the uncanny to the work of “figurability.” The imaginative elaboration of conviction is not a developmental phenomenon so much as an irreducible psychical event that comes about on account of the “incompleteness” of psychic structure. César and Sára Botella forge a semantic connection between the internal organisation of discursive constructs and the capacity of those constructs to refer to lived experience. By comparing constructions in analysis with children’s fairy tales (“Once upon a time...”), the Botellas (2005, p. 37) place greater emphasis on the side of believability than on the side of “material truth,” weighing the truth-effects of one’s own convictions against recollection and the hidden but legible meanings of repression: “the analysand’s evolution, does not reside so much, as [Freud] admits himself, in the recollections it can evoke or in its historical reality as in the degree of conviction that arouses in the analysand.”

In a line of thinking that extends throughout Freud’s entire body of work, conviction may be seen as an extension of *catharsis*. The classical location of *catharsis* (alongside *poiesis* and *mimesis*) renders conviction (“belief in”) available as a way of speaking the truth by means of fiction. The point is not that “historical truth” is inimical to the actualities pertaining to the past. Our sense of the past is grounded rather in impressions that are already “worked over” by “an initial metaphorical impulse” (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 23). How does this affect the transmission of memory-traces? Again, there is no reason to assume that Parsons was hallucinating, or reminiscing in hysterical fashion, when, alone at night in the woods, he sensed another human presence beside him. The uncanny impression, however, does not admit of hard-and-fast distinctions – that is to say, between recollection and construction, time past and time present, the literal and the metaphoric.

As a single enveloping moment or situation of alterity, the uncanny is a source of “permanent disquiet” in which the “indefinite limits” of the Freudian science itself are laid open (de M’Uzan, 2011, p. 200). The disclosure is twofold. On the one hand, finding oneself in a world “without certain and defined limits” (de M’Uzan, 2009, p. 145) is obviously a disturbing *feeling*: “The sentiment of the uncanny originates...in certain themes linked to more or less ancient taboos. If we grant that primal experience is constituted by transgression, we can accept Freud’s theory as to the origin of the uncanny” (Todorov, 1975, p. 48). As such, the return of the repressed and castration anxiety account for the transformation of something frightening into something uncanny (Freud, 1919, p. 243). On the other hand, Todorov (1975, p. 48) goes further by linking the “sentiment” of the uncanny to its *effect*, particularly in the works of Poe and Dostoevsky: “the uncanny is not linked to the fantastic but to what we might call ‘an experience of limits’.” The uncanny effect operates between “ancient taboos” and the primary affectivity of living-there and being-with, between sexual drive functioning and the “self-preservative, non-instinctual dimension of identity” (de M’Uzan, 2009, p. 143).

Accordingly, Parsons presents his account of memory “between death and the primal scene,” where the uncanny proceeds on the one hand “from something familiar which has been repressed” (Freud, 1919, p. 247) and, on the other, from a feeling of “derealisation” (*Entfremdungsgefühl*) or “depersonalisation,” a feeling either that “a piece of reality” or “a piece of oneself” is inherently strange (Freud, 1936, pp. 244-245). The Botellas (2005, p. 37) also raise the question of “limits” on clinical grounds: “we wonder where the limits are – the conjunction and disjunction between the interpretation construction and the intervention

fairy-tale.” The implications for the remembered past are clear – “the hallucinatory power of animistic thinking, intrinsic to all conviction, participates in the evocation of our most ordinary memories” (2005, p. 90). The Botellas take their bearings from late Freud. Similarly, Parsons (2011, p. 61) credits the vital force of the uncanny in conjunction with the vital elements of the past, arguing that like psychoanalysis itself, the uncanny possesses an innovative power of disruption, that it is “subversive” above all in its potentiality: “Its nature is to waylay us, destabilising habitual modes of seeing both the world and ourselves, and offering up new ones. It carries the potential to open fresh perspectives that are closed to experience which stays, or is kept, too safely within existing frameworks of understanding.”

How is it possible for psychoanalysis to do the kind of thing Parsons claims it does? How does analysis realise its “subversive” power of action? The uncanny mnemonic-trace brings this question sharply into focus. The link between the remembered past and the uncanny moment serves as confirmation of a general phenomenon of meaning, whose reach goes outside language even as it qualifies itself temporally. As Ricoeur (1978, p. 2) points out, language passes outside or beyond itself, precisely where “reality remains a reference, without ever becoming a restriction.” It is not a question of representational fidelity (holding a mirror to the world) so much as “another sort of reference to other dimensions of reality” (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 145). What is realistically true admits different meanings. Memory makes this clear: psychical, interior memory on the one hand and, on the other, writing, technique, and fiction are inextricably linked in the act of remembering. The last word belongs neither to psychism nor to technics. Rather, the opening of new or fresh “perspectives” involves a creative work at the interface of time and narrative, where, under the sublime auspice of the uncanny mnemonic-trace, “inner experience” (*l'expérience intérieure*) itself is neither inside nor outside, but persistently bordering the inside and the outside.

Fragments, traces, and impressions are primordially connected by the propulsive force of metaphor; and the connective synthesis at work in the enigma of novel meaning, the constitutive work of “linking” (Bion, 1959), is indicative of a more extensive semantic reach than one finds either in the semiotic “imaginary” (the synthesis of the sign), or in the idea of the ego itself as “unconscious phantasy” (the synthesis of the *cogito*). Here, as elsewhere, Freud defines the subversionary import of psychoanalysis as a general theory of meaning and action: uncanny moments and situations are replete with feelings called up or freely evoked, if not established *ad hoc*, by “the possibilities of poetic licence.” The mnemonic-trace itself accounts for the connotative possibilities of the narrative *plēnum*. What was previously familiar is experienced in the uncanny moment as both familiar and unfamiliar; a new relationship toward memory, reality, and the world comes to be in that moment. Freud (1919, p. 251), after all, credits the storyteller with “a peculiarly directive power” of re-description: “by means of the moods he can put us into, he is able to guide the current of our emotions, to dam it up in one direction and make it flow in another, and he often obtains a great variety of effects from the same material.” Finally, it is our stories that come from afar, that move us most profoundly and, as mementoes of our archaic heritage, repeatedly animate our most primitive feelings and animistic beliefs.



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